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Controversy

Joel Baron
The Faxon Company

Thomas W. Leonhardt
University of the Pacific

Michael Markwith
The Faxon Company

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Controversy is the Spice of Life

COMPUTOPIA AND ALL THAT by Joel Baron (Faxon)

I was fairly appalled as I got into the initial paragraphs of N. David Mermin's recent article, "Publishing in Computopia" (*Physics Today*, May 1991); I became alarmed as I ploughed through its increasingly strident later paragraphs; and, by the time I had completed the article, I began wondering what had caused the author to become such a cynic.

Does Mr. Mermin actually envision a world where everyone is worthy of becoming their own peer reviewer? Does he see no value to the editorial process that journals impose on every submission? Is every physician enough of a biostatistician to judge the validity of the data in every article s/he reads? Does every physicist understand the nuances of superconductivity so well that they no longer wish to have an expert opinion? Does everyone have so much free time that they will look forward to browsing an endless proliferation of bulletin boards and an even more endless proliferation of articles? Is Mr. Mermin so cynical that he believes scientists publish only for the sake of promotion and tenure and care nothing for their fields of research? Has *Physics Today* done away with any level of editorial/peer review?

DIRECTORS DO READ

By Thomas W. Leonhardt
(University of the Pacific)

This is great. Finally there is a place to share one's reading and reading interests as Arnold Hirshon did in the previous issue of this magazine. There may be an information glut for things that aim to be scholarly but for librarians there is an information void for things that aim to be well-informed and interesting. Some of the electronic publications and list servers are also beginning to fill some of this information void even though many of the contributors are accused of gluttony, but none of them have quite the editorial voice of this rag, *Against the Grain*. If something is fun to read,

let's keep it. It's those other things that should go, the ones that are not read or cited, merely bound and stored on the shelves lest someone complain that we don't have them.

But I digress. This is meant to be a sharing of books (I suppose other reading matter could be shared, too). I am pleased to have been asked to contribute something. One of my favorite literary people is Christopher Morley who encouraged reading and who championed new writers (Joseph Conrad and William McFee are two who come to mind) his columns "The Bowling Green" (*New York Evening Post* and *Saturday Review of Literature*) and "Trade Winds" (*Saturday Review of Literature*) in the 1920s and 1930s. If I get to write another of these short pieces I intend to say more about Morley.

First I would like to mention *Academic Librarianship in a Transformational Age: Program, Politics, and Personnel* by Allen B. Veaner, (G.K. Hall, 1990). I read the book because I used to work for Allen and having heard something about it before it was published, I was curious. My advice to all librarians is to read it. If you think you want to be a library director at an academic library, read this book. Then find a director you know and trust and talk about what you have read. Allen is not exaggerating.

If you don't want to be a library director, read this book. You will better know why you think the way you do. Then take a friend who is a director to lunch and commiserate.

If you already are a director and have not read the book, please do. You will find that Allen Veaner has told it like it is and has added a much needed book to the literature of management in higher education, an oxymoron if ever there was one.

There is another book that I have enjoyed immensely. Part of the price one pays, or that I have paid, as a dean

of libraries is that I do not seem to read as much literature as I used to. This year seemed no different than the past four years until I discovered Joseph Epstein (that is, a friend told me about him).

My library has only one of his books, *Partial Payments: Essays on Writers and Their Lives*. Joseph Epstein is an essayist and as good as any you will find anywhere. He is intelligent, erudite, and a wonderful stylist. He writes so well that reading him is as if you were discussing his subjects with him. He makes you respond, especially when he is writing about writers. He makes me want to read authors I know by name only and he makes me want to read authors that I am familiar with and fond of because of when I read them. Two essays that I most enjoyed for this reason are "Is It All Right to Read Somerset Maugham?" (yes, it is but read the essay anyway before you pick up *Of Human Bondage* instead of some of Maugham's essays) and "A Boy's Own Author," a nostalgic piece about John R. Tunis, a writer best known for his sports books for boys, except they were really about honor and ethics and perseverance and character.

Epstein quotes from Tunis's 1964 autobiography *A Measure of Independence* about writing for boys. "A book written for my audience doesn't have to be merely as good as a book for adults; it must — or should be — better. Not only does youth deserve the best, but also no youths read a book because it is on the best-seller list. There is no best-seller list. Nor do they read it because it has a huge advertising budget, or is well reviewed; they read it for one reason alone, they want to. They find it says something to them in an area they know and understand. These readers are important, perhaps the most important in the country today."

I have not read a John R. Tunis book in many winters but if Joseph Epstein can re-read them and enjoy them, so can I and intend to spend part

of my summer vacation doing so. You might want to dip into some of the favorites of your youth and see how they pass the test of time. And if you want to skip the *New York Times* best seller list and read some good books, the kind that say something to you in a way that you understand, read some Joseph Epstein and he will advise you on some summer reading.

COLLABORATION & COMMUNITY

by *Michael Markwith* (Faxon)

This piece is a reaction not to recent articles as in the last issue, but to a presentation at the Faxon Institute for Scholarly Communication in Reston, VA on April 28. (Sorry, Katina, I haven't found all that much excitement in the professional literature these past few weeks. But I think there may be some slight controversy nonetheless in what follows.)

The speaker was Michael Schrage who writes the "Innovation" column for the *Los Angeles Times* and is the author of a new book, *Shared Minds: The New Technologies of Collaboration*, Random House, 1990.

It was Sunday early evening, before reception and dinner. I had spent the afternoon with friends in wonderful Memorial Stadium but had to leave the Orioles game in the sixth inning to be at the opening of the Institute on time. So I was not a "happy camper" dressed in coat and tie and deprived of witnessing first-hand a come-from-behind O's victory as I settled into the last row to hear Michael Schrage speak on the role of technology in the creation and use of information.

I thought nothing could improve my life after the sun and warmth of the Orioles playing on a Sunday afternoon—I was wrong. Happily, enthusiastically, and pleasantly (all in retrospect) wrong!

This talk by Michael Schrage clarified the focus of our profession/my work and provided a framework that can only be seen as "breakthrough" in understanding the new arenas in which we are beginning to play the information and research game for the future.

In essence, how we view and participate in the changing Information Profession.

The framework that Michael (not Mr. Schrage as he's only 31) proposed is to replace the word INFORMATION with RELATIONSHIP when used with technology. Outstanding! Especially in all the sloganeering that encapsulates the "new technologies of the Information Age." I especially appreciated his call for a "Chief Relationships Office" not a "Chief Information Officer." A profound insight! And he continued to shoot down futurist icons by claiming that Toffler was wrong for saying information is power—the real power is not in the information but in the community it creates! The power is in the user community (the customer to us business types) and he further won my admiration by stating that "networks should be designed to force collaborative relationships (i.e., communities not individuals). The future is, then, in the creation, care, and feeding of the virtual communities created from the collaboration of researchers/users/members of the networks. There is "Team" strength and success (remember my Orioles?) rather than an "Individual iconoclast." Power is in the community, not the individual. And nowhere is this truer, Michael said, than in the academic journal publishing world. If the researcher is going to find a cure for AIDS or cancer, develop food sources, and find environmentally safe energy sources to improve the quality of life and keep old Mother Earth ticking, then there's strength and success in numbers not iconoclasts.

I like his word: COLLABORATION! It is a powerful word. We use Partnerships in the Library/Vendor world, but Collaboration is more analogous to COMMUNITY (a direct correlation according to Michael<both of us>) and provides a stronger framework for our professional roles in the Relationship (nee Information) chain from producer to user.

But what does this all really mean in our daily lives??? As the readers of *ATG* might suspect, I did some collaboration to try and clarify what this

new terminology and framework might mean in real, practical terms. The insight of a Library Director who participated in the conference is "that librarians already operate in the Schrage world, and it was interesting that Schrage saw this as the way the information world should operate. Librarians, after all, believe that information does belong to the community and that we should be able to provide the community with this information. Librarians also often take an activist role in seeing information as a way to empower the community."

I firmly agree that, in fact, libraries do have the power to create the communities as they work with various researchers and (yes, even students!). The question is do you/we/they? Or do we all focus on the power of the technology and all "its wonder" rather than the community. I don't know the answer; I understand the philosophy but am searching for the models in action. I don't know the answers, Michael Schrage didn't offer a panacea or placebos either, by the way. However, I suspect that if we don't actively participate in the "care and feeding of" research communities we may find our users going elsewhere for their information. A thought not new to me by any means, but a real possibility nonetheless.

Are there models that readers of *ATG* can share to help demonstrate the value of relationship technologies? Is ACQNET such an attempt in researching issues that affect acquisitions and collection development? I'm not certain that all research has to "save the world" (sometimes don't we need saving from our saviors) just be relationship/community based. This is using the power of information.

There will be other ball games (I'll see my Orioles again at Memorial and "on the road"); but that's not the reason I'm glad we left the game on April 21 in the sixth inning. I strongly recommend Michael Schrage's book *Shared Minds* so that "you" too can grapple with and try to understand the power of relationship technologies and collaborative communities as these concepts apply to the leadership roles that each of us can and should play in the changing Information Profession. ☘